

100/55
*Ministers set for the Defense
of the GOSPEL.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACH'D AT

E X O N.

MAY 4. 1720.

BEFORE

An Assembly of the United Mini-
sters of DEVON and CORNWALL.

*Published at the Request of many of the
Auditors.*

By BENJAMIN WILLS.

*Amicus Plato, Amicus Socrates, sed magis amica
Veritas.*

L O N D O N.

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PHIL. i. 17.----latter Part.

*Knowing that I am set for the
Defence of the Gospel.*



THE Connexion of the Words with the foregoing Context you have thus :
THE One preach Christ of Contention, not sincerely, supposing to add Affliction to my Bonds.—But the Other of Love, Knowing that I am set for the Defence of the Gospel.

THE Conduct of Divine Providence in some Instances is so strange and mysterious, that it raises our Admiration, and entertains the Mind with Wonder and Surprise.

WHO could have imagin'd that such a fiery Persecutor and bitter Enemy to the Gospel of Christ as *Paul* once was, would have manifested an uncommon Zeal in espousing its Cause, maintaining its Purity, and vindicating its Honour and Reputation in the World. But God's Thoughts are not as our Thoughts, neither are his Ways as our Ways.

THE Great God chuseth what Instruments he pleaseth to do his Work, and advance his Interest and Kingdom amongst Men, and by his Sovereign Grace soon transforms a Minister of Darkness, into an Angel of Light, and calls him off from the Enemies Quarters to fight the Battles of the Lord, and *endure Hardness as a good Soldier of Jesus Christ.*

As there were signal Marks and Characters of a peculiar Grandeur evident and conspicuous in the Conversion of this Apostle, so they did evidently presage something peculiar and extraordinary in his future Management and Behaviour. He was stop'd in his mad Career by a loud Voice from Heaven, and surrounded with dazzling Beams of Light, as a *Prælude* to that bright and noble Part he was to act upon the Stage of Christianity. This Great Apostle, tho' *One born out of due Time*, yet did not come short of his Fellow-Apostles for Ministerial Zeal, Diligence and Fidelity, but distinguish'd himself by his superior Graces and Labours, and shin'd like a Star of the first Magnitude in that high Office and exalted Orb he mov'd in. Tho' this Man was remarkable for his Humility, yet when his Commission was call'd in Question, his Person despis'd, and his Ministry in Danger of being brought into Contempt, he shews his Resentment of the Injury that was done him, and insists upon it, that he was not inferiour to other Apostles, and might challenge an equal Defe-
 rence and Respect. ^a *For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chief Apostles.* And in the Words of my Text he speaks of himself as the Great *Defender* of Christianity, and a Champion

^a 2 Cor. xi. 5.

for the blessed Gospel. *Knowing that I am set for the Defence of the Gospel.* Whatever Baseness or Cowardice others might be aw'd or flatter'd into, he was not to be wrought upon by all the Terrors or Artifices of Men to betray the Cause of his Lord and Master, but resolves to support the Gospel of Christ to the utmost of his Power.

WHAT I design in the Prosecution of this Subject, shall be reduc'd to these following Heads.

I. I SHALL shew, what we are to understand by the Gospel.

II. MAKE it appear that the Gospel is worthy of Defence.

III. ENQUIRE in what Respects the Apostle *Paul* was set for the *Defence of the Gospel.*

IV. SHEW, that the Ministers of *Christ*, in all Ages, are oblig'd to stand up in its Defence.

V. SHEW, how the Gospel should be defended. And,

VI. APPLY the Whole.

I. THEN, I am to shew, what we are to understand by the *Gospel.* And by the Gospel we are to understand that Scheme of Truth and Duty which is laid down in the New Testament, or that divine and excellent Religion which our blessed Saviour came to set up and establish in the World. The Gospel contains Matters of Faith, as well as of Practice; and surely the sublime Doctrine of the *Trinity*, and the great Mystery of Godliness, *God manifest in the Flesh*, are to be reckon'd as Parts of the Gospel, as well as those admirable Rules and Precepts it
lays

lays before us to regulate our Conduct, and refine our Morals.

THO' the *Gospel* in a narrow and limited Sense signifies good News, or glad Tidings of a Saviour; yet taken in its *full Latitude*, it comprehends the whole System of Christianity, which contains *Credenda*, as well as *Agenda*, Things to be believed, as well as Things to be done; and it is possible for a Man to ^a make Shipwreck of *Faith*, as well as a good Conscience. And you read of some that ^c have erred concerning the *Faith*. And we are to ^d contend for the *Faith*. And we are to ^e hold the *Mystery of the Faith* in a pure Conscience.

THERE are some fundamental Truths laid down in the *Gospel*, which are not to be opposed or denied without apparent Hazard and Danger to the Soul. Thus, such as ^f deny the Lord that bought them, are said to bring in damnable Heresies.

II. I AM to make it appear, that the *Gospel* is worthy of Defence. And,

1. THE *Gospel* is worthy of Defence, as it is a Divine Revelation.

2. As it presents the World with a Religion which excels all others. And,

3. As it lays the surest Foundation for our Faith and Hope.

1. The *Gospel* is worthy of Defence, as it is a Divine Revelation. *Secret Things belong to God, but those Things which are reveal'd unto us, and to our Children.* And such a glorious Revelation as is to be found in the blessed *Gospel* deserves to be kept sacred and inviolable. Chri-

^b 1 Tim. i. 19. ^c 1 Tim. vi. 21. ^d Jude iii. ^e 1 Tim. iii. 19. ^f 1 Pet. ii. 1.

Christianity is no humane Invention, or *cunningly devised Fable*, but of a Divine Original, and makes a bright Discovery of the Nature and Attributes of God, of his Kingdom and Government, and of his kind and favourable Thoughts towards the Apostate Children of Men. § *No Man hath seen God at any Time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the Bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*

THE *Gospel* is worthy to be defended, as it is a supernatural Revelation, and carries the Marks of Divinity along with it, as it unfolds the *Arcana* of Heaven, and reveals the most profound Mysteries ; as it displays the Divine Perfections in a peculiar Radiancy, and stands confirmed by a shining Train of uncontested Miracles.

2. THE *Gospel* is worthy of Defence, as it presents the World with a Religion which excels all others. Christianity is a noble Institution, admirably adapted to repair the Ruins of the Fall, to recover Mankind from their woful Apostacy, and raise humane Nature to the highest Pitch of Perfection it is capable of. This is a Religion which contains a compleat System of Divine Precepts, which gives the best Rules of Living, enforceth them with the strongest Motives and the most powerful Sanctions, and lays before us the most perfect Pattern and Example, even our Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Institution justly calls for a vigorous Defence, because it vastly exceeds all others, shines with inimitable Glory, and sets our Duty and Happiness in the clearest and most convincing Light.

THE best Philosophy of the Heathens was but a blind Guide, and left them in the dark as to

§ John i. 18.

their

their Notions and Pursuits of true Blessedness; and their brightest Morals were tainted with a base Alloy, and corrupted by many gross and impure Mixtures. *The World by Wisdom knew not God.* Mahometanism is beneath the Dignity of a rational Being, gives too great a Latitude to the lower Appetites, and proposeth a Heaven more becoming a Brute than a Man. But the Gospel presents us with a Religion suited to our intellectual Natures, which tends to refine and improve the nobler Faculties of the Soul, and opens purer Scenes of Glory to our View. Christ by the Gospel hath scatter'd the interposing Clouds, and brought *Life and Immortality to Light.* Instead of deluding the Mind with the Romantick Dream of *Elysian Fields*, and a Paradise of sensual Pleasures; he tells us of a World of unspotted Purity and immaculate Bliss and Joy, where we shall be made perfect in our Likeness to God, and see him as he is.

3. The Gospel is worthy of Defence, as it lays the surest Foundation for our Faith and Hope.

THIS is the great ^h Gospel-Record, *that God hath given to us eternal Life, and this Life is in his Son.* The Gospel brings the glad Tidings of a Saviour. This displays the Divinity of his Nature, the Glory of his Person, the Dignity of his sufferings, and the infinite Merit of his Righteousness and Blood; so that *God may now be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* ⁱ *This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners.* And as Christ came into the World, and died for our Offences, (according

^h 1 John v. 11.

ⁱ 1 Tim. i. 15.

to the Gospel) so he rose again for our Justification. ^k *Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to plead their Cause, and intercede for them.*

THE Gospel contains an Account of the Incarnation, Satisfaction and Intercession of the Son of God, and of the rich and precious Promises of Pardon of Sin, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and eternal Life, which are a sure Ground, and stable Bottom for a Christian to raise his Hope and Confidence upon, and so is worthy of our utmost Vindication and Defence: *For if the Foundations be destroy'd, what can the Righteous do?* If we give up divine Revelation, we have nothing firm and solid to fix upon, we wander in the Dark, quit our glorious Hopes, and renounce our bright Prospects of a blessed Immortality. Therefore we have all imaginable Reason to contend earnestly for the Faith once deliver'd to the Saints; for by giving up the Articles of our Faith, we in effect disclaim the common Salvation. If our Faith be vain, we are yet in our Sins; but if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus shall God bring with him.

III. I propos'd to enquire in what Respects the Apostle Paul was set for the Defence of the Gospel. And,

1. THE Apostle Paul was set for the Defence of the Gospel, in Respect of his extraordinary Zeal and Vigilance to maintain its Purity. And,
2. IN Respect of his extraordinary Labours and Sufferings.

^k Heb. vii. 25.

I. THE Apostle *Paul* was set for the Defence of the Gospel, in Respect of his extraordinary Zeal and Vigilance, to maintain its Purity. The eminent Care, and ardent Zeal of this great *Apostle* to preserve the Purity of the Gospel against the sly Insinuations, and bold Attempts of false Apostles, and seducing Teachers, shine bright and illustrious in several of his Epistles. When the Doctrine of Christ was * *adulterated*, or *exposed to Sale*, he could not stand by as an unmov'd Spectator, or shew a Coldness and Indifference when Truth was in Danger. If the Gospel was attack'd by the *Sleight of Men*, and *cunning Craftiness* whereby they lay in wait to deceive, he appears vigorously in its Defence, and as its Guardian Angel brandisheth the Sword of the Spirit to repel the daring Assault.

THIS great Patron of Christianity bravely withstands its avowed Enemies, and exposes the Sophistry, and lays open the subtil and artful Management of its pretended Friends. With what a jealous Eye does he watch over the Churches? How earnestly does he exhort and intreat them to hold fast the Form of sound Words? And how zealous and active is this Apostle to put a stop to the Growth of Corruption and Error? Addressing himself to the *Corinthians*, he saith, ¹ *I am jealous over you with godly Jealousy; for I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste Virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any Means, as the Serpent beguiled Eve through his Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ.* The

* 2 Cor. ii. 17. *We are not as many, which καπηλεύοντες, (corrupt) the Word of God.*

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3.

same Apostle writing to the *Thessalonians* speaks thus; ^m *For this Cause when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your Faith, lest by some Means the Tempter have tempted you, and our Labour be in vain.* In his *Epistle to the Galatians*, he relates how stedfast he was in asserting and maintaining the native Purity and Simplicity of the Gospel, against ⁿ *false Brethren unawares brought in, who (says he) came privily to spy out our Liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into Bondage. To whom we gave Place by Subjection, no not for an Hour; that the Truth of the Gospel might continue with you.* And *Gal. i. 8, 9.* like one fir'd with a divine Ardour, and touch'd with a Coal from the heavenly Altar. He declares with a peculiar Warmth against any that should pervert the Gospel of Christ, and set up a new Scheme of Religion under that venerable Name. *But tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preach'd unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any Man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* That Revelation Paul had receiv'd and publish'd to the World as the Gospel of Christ, he was concern'd to defend with a Zeal proportionable to its great Moment and vast Importance. He did not stand by as a Neuter in the Cause of his glorious Redeemer, tamely give up the sacred Truths of the Gospel, or suffer crafty and designing Men, who crept in unawares, and corrupted the Word of God, to spread their pernicious Errors without Resistance or Opposition, but manifested a deep Concern to suppress the growing Contagion, and

^m 1 Thes. iii. 5.ⁿ Gal. ii. 4, 5.

exhorted Christians to watch, and stand fast in the Faith. If any invented a new Frame of Christianity, or pretended to set up a new Light in the Church, contrary to the Doctrine he had taught, he was very careful to warn the Christians in his Days of the Fallacy and Seduction, and shewed them the Vanity of trusting to an *Ignis fatuus*, which would turn them out of the right Way, and draw them into a dangerous Bog, if not lead them over a fatal Precipice. The Apostle tells the *Corinthians*, *° According to the Grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise Master-Builder I have laid the Foundation, and another buildeth thereon; but let every Man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other Foundation can no Man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* If Men arose, speaking perverse Things, with a Design to make a Party, and draw the Disciples after them, this Apostle had so much Zeal for the Truth, that he presseth those under his Care with great Affection and Earnestness to be upon their Guard, lest they being also led away with the Error of the Wicked, should fall from their own Stedfastness.

2. THE Apostle Paul was set for the Defence of the Gospel, in respect of his extraordinary Labours and Sufferings. Tho' he calls himself *the least of the Apostles*, yet he says, that he *labour'd more abundantly than they all.*

WITH what uncommon Fervour and Activity did this eminent Servant of Jesus Christ discharge his Apostolical Function? As his Office oblig'd him to go from Place to Place, he gives himself no Rest, but with unwearied Diligence traverseth Sea and Land to propagate the Chri-

° 1 Cor. iii. 10, 11.

° 1 Cor. xv. 10.

stian Religion, and gain Profelytes to his blessed Lord and Master. He sails from Port to Port, and travels from City to City, and from Nation to Nation, preaching the *Gospel of the Kingdom*. His *Epistles* written to the Churches, which he had planted in distant Regions and different Countries, stand upon publick Record as signal Monuments of his indefatigable Labour and Industry. What mighty Toils and Fatigues, and bitter Conflicts and Sufferings did *Paul* endure in spreading and defending the Doctrine of Christ? And that which added to his Burden, was the mighty Charge which returned with the Revolution of every Day, the Care of all the Churches. ¶ *Are they Ministers of Christ?* (*I speak as a Fool*) *I am more; in Labours more abundant; in Stripes above Measure; in Deaths oft.—Of the Jews five Times received I forty Stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with Rods; once I was stoned; thrice I suffer'd Shipwreck; a Night and a Day I have been in the Deep.—In journeying often; in Perils of Waters; in Perils of Robbers; in Perils by mine own Countrymen; in Perils by the Heathen; in Perils in the City; in Perils in the Wilderness; in Perils in the Sea; in Perils among false Brethren.—In Weariness and Painfulness; in Watchings often; in Hunger and Thirst; in Fastings often; in Cold and Nakedness.—Besides those Things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the Care of all the Churches.*

THIS excellent Apostle spares no Pains, fears no Dangers, and sticks at no Hardships and Difficulties, but as a resolute and brave *Defender of the Faith* stands ready to be offer'd, and fall a glo-

nious Victim in the Redeemer's Cause. He fought the good Fight, expos'd himself in the high Places of the Field, and bore in his Body *the Marks of the Lord Jesus*. Like a Christian Hero he stands it out against all Opposition, and is ready to receive the mortal Wound in Defence of the Gospel, and seal the Truth with the Testimony of his dearest Blood. With what invincible Fortitude does he speak? ** None of these Things move me, neither count I my Life dear unto my self, so that I might finish my Course with Joy, and the Ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the Grace of God. And, ^s I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.*

IV. I AM to shew, that the Ministers of Christ in all Ages, are oblig'd to stand up in Defence of the Gospel.

YOU read that an ascended Saviour ^t gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers: For the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. And surely these great and valuable Ends cannot be promoted and advanc'd, unless the Foundation be secur'd; and the great Truths of the Gospel defended against the cunning Artifices and open Attempts of secret and avowed Enemies. It was predicted, that in the latter Times Men should ^v depart from the Faith. Therefore the Apostle exhorts Timothy ^w to watch in all Things.

WHEN the Apostle was taking his Leave of the Elders of *Ephesus*, with what Solemnity

^{*} Acts xxi. 24.

^t Acts xxi. 13.

^u Ephes. iv. 11,

^v 1 Tim. iv. 1.

^w 2 Tim. iv. 5.

doth he charge them to take heed of themselves, and to all the Flock, and to watch over them with the utmost Care and Tenderneſs, that they might not be devour'd by * *grievous Wolves*, which he foretold would *enter in among them*, or ſeduc'd by Men which ſhould ariſe among themſelves, *ſpeaking perverſe Things*.

THE Titles and Characters Miniſters are inveſted with in the Holy Scriptures naturally and plainly import, that they are ſet for the *Defence of the Goſpel*. As they are *Watchmen*, they are bound in Duty to be upon the Guard, and give the Alarm upon the Approach of Danger. As they are *Stewards of the Myſteries of God*, they are oblig'd to vindicate the awful and myſterious Doctrines of Chriſtianity, to provide wholeſome Food, and give every one his Portion in due Season. As they are *Labourers in God's Vineyard*, they are to uſe their beſt Skill to extirpate every poiſonous Weed, every Heretical Opinion, and pluck up every baneful and pernicious Error. As they are *Shepherds*, they are to guard the Flock of Chriſt againſt falſe Teachers, who put on a Diſguiſe, and come to them in Sheep's Clothing, as well as againſt ravenous Beaſts of Prey, which appear in naked and open Hoſtility. As *Biſhops* or *Overſeers*, they are to lead their People in the Way of Truth, and the Paths of Righteouſneſs, and ſo *feed* the Church of God which he hath purchas'd with his own *Blood*. As they are the *Ambaſſadors* of King Jeſus, they are to purſue their Inſtructions, plead the Cauſe, and aſſert the Grandeur and Dignity of their Royal Maſter. The Miniſters of Chriſt are under an indiſpenſable Obligation to ſupport his

* Acts xx. 29. 30. 31.

Honour, and keep his Doctrine pure and entire. They are bound to defend the Gospel, as it is a *Treasure* lodg'd in their Hands, and as it is a *Trust* committed to their Care. ² *We have this Treasure in earthen Vessels. As we are allow'd of God to be put in Trust with the Gospel.* If we should barter away this heavenly Treasure, or betray the sacred and important Trust we are charg'd with, we shall be call'd to a dreadful Reckoning at last. We are to *watch for Souls* as those that must *give an Account*. Necessity is upon us, and *Woe* be to us, if we *preach not the Gospel*.

V. I am to shew, how the Ministers of Christ should defend the Gospel.

Now the Ministers of Christ should defend the Gospel by just and honourable, sober and Christian Methods. If a Man *strive for the Mastery*, he should *strive lawfully*. We should carefully avoid all sinister and unrighteous Proceedings in contending for the Faith, and act with unblemish'd Integrity, like Men of Conscience, and Men of Honour, *giving no Offence in any Thing, that the Ministry be not blamed*. When we set ourselves to defend the blessed Gospel, Pride and Insolence, Passion and Prejudice should not be Parties in the Controversy, lest the glorious Cause we espouse be impair'd and weaken'd by our ill Conduct, and criminal Behaviour.

WHEN we are asserting the great and important Doctrines of Christianity, we should not forget the excellent Rules and Precepts of it, but manage with a due Decorum, that the Adversaries of Truth may not talk reproachfully,

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 7.

² 1 Theff. ii. 4.

or if they should speak Evil of us without a Cause, they may be asham'd, who *falsly accuse our good Conversation in Christ*. And Ministers (as I conceive) should make use of these following Methods in Defence of the Gospel, which I take to be proper, just and equitable.

I. THE Ministers of Christ should *defend* the Gospel by Argument and Persuasion. We should defend the blessed Gospel, not by Force of Arms, but by Dint of Argument; not by humane Tribunals, or the vain Terrors of Men, but by Scripture-Evidence, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. *The Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal. And the Wrath of Man worketh not the Righteousness of God.* The Ministers of Christ are to make Proselytes, and compel People to come in, not by sanguinary Laws or Acts of Violence, but by all the Powers of Reason, by all the Methods of Christian Persuasion, and by all the Charms of sacred and divine Eloquence. We are to draw Souls to the Lord Jesus in a Way suited to their rational Natures. We should appeal to the Understandings of Men, endeavour to convey Light into their Minds, and lay before them such plain and convincing Proofs, as may help them to see the Reasonableness of the Christian Religion, and believe the Truths of the Gospel. And if any should depart from the Faith, and fall into Error, we should make use of all persuasive Motives and Arguments to reduce them from their Wanderings. We should intreat them to look into the Scriptures, and peruse the sacred Oracles with an humble and teachable Disposition, laying aside all Prejudices; and we should shew them how plainly and fully the divine Writings assert and express these weighty Points, which

are necessary to Salvation. Our blessed Saviour confuting the *Sadducees*, tells them, ^a *Ye err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God.* And *John* v. he having insisted upon such Topicks, as prov'd his Divinity; *ŷ. 39.* he bids the *Jews*, who had rais'd Cavils against him, to *search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal Life, and they are they which testify of me.* And when the Ministers of Christ are engag'd in defending the Gospel, they should do it with Calmness and Temper, avoiding all *Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-speaking*, guarding against railing Accusations, and scornful and abusive Language, as knowing a good Cause may suffer Wrong by such a wretched Management; and a bad one must needs grow worse, and appear more odious in the Eyes of all wise and good Men, by such base and dishonourable Methods as these. ^b *The Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient: In Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth.*

2. THE Ministers of Christ should back their Endeavours with frequent and fervent Prayers.

MINISTERS should be Men of Prayer. This spiritual Weapon well manag'd may help us to cut a glorious Way through the mighty Opposition which is made against the Doctrine of Christ, and triumph over all the Strength and Policy of its Adversaries. When we are contending for the Faith, the most likely Method to succeed, is to fight upon our Knees. We should frequently send up our devout and earnest

^a Matt. xxii. 29.

^b 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

Addresses to Heaven, and call down divine Aids from above : For *the Wisdom of God is wiser than Men, and the Power of God is stronger than Men.* The most pressing Motives and Arguments may fail of Success, unless the Lord be pleas'd to reveal his own Arm, convince the Mind, and fasten the Nail in a sure Place. *The Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battel to the Strong,* but the Victory belongs to God. The Spirit must *take of the Things of Christ,* and shew them to Men, before they can see the Force and Evidence of Divine Truths. When *Peter* made a Confession of his Faith, and said to Jesus, *Thou art Christ the Son of the Living God.* Our Saviour tells him, *‘Flesh and Blood hath not reveal'd it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* ^d *Lydia's Heart* was first open'd, and then she attended to the Things which were spoken by *Paul.* Gospel-Mysteries are wrapt up in a Cloud, and conceal'd from the benighted Understanding before Christ removes the interposing Veil, and shines in upon the Soul with Beams of heavenly Light. Therefore let us give ourselves to Prayer, and humbly implore the great and good Shepherd and Bishop of Souls, for such as sit in Darkness, that the Sun of Righteousness may arise upon them with healing under his Wings, and that he would please to purge his Church from all dangerous and destructive Errors; that he would *have Compassion upon the Ignorant,* and feed them with Knowledge and Understanding; and that he would reduce the wandering Sheep, and bring back them *that are out of the Way.*

^c Matt. xvi. 16.

^d Acts xvi. 14.

3. THE Ministers of Christ should *defend* the *Gospel*, by a due Care, as to Persons whom they ordain, or set apart to the Sacred Office. Ministers should not rashly engage in a Solemnity of this Nature, without enquiring into Mens Principles, and Manner of Life. The just Regard we ought to have for the Honour of God, the Interest of Religion, and the Good of precious Souls, should oblige us to proceed with a becoming Caution in this weighty Affair. Paul enjoins *Timothy* ^e to lay Hand suddenly on no Man, that he might not be Partaker of other Mens Sins, but keep himself pure. And the Apostle exhorts him thus ; ^f *The Things that thou hast heard of me among many Witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful Men, who shall be able to teach others also.* The Dispensation of the Gospel is too great and valuable a Trust to be deposited in the Hands of those, who would horribly abuse, or notoriously pervert it. Such as grossly corrupt the Word of God, as well as the Ignorant and Scandalous, are no proper Persons to serve at the Altar, and minister in Holy Things. An *Heretick*, tho' he may quote Scripture to patronize his Error, should not be encourag'd, but *rejected*. The Apostle *Peter* speaks of some, who ^g *wrest the Scriptures unto their own Destruction.* Therefore the subscribing the bare Words of the Bible, are not a sufficient Evidence that Men are sound in the Faith ; and it must be Imposition with a Witness, for Ministers to be compell'd to *ordain*, or *recommend* those, whom they are perswaded in their Consciences hold false and pernicious Opinions, and are likely to scatter Poison among the People instead

^e 1 Tim. v. 22.^f 2 Tim. ii. 2.^g 2 Pet. iii. 16.

of wholesome Food. If Candidates for the Ministry are not to be examin'd in what Sense they take the Scriptures, how can the Ordainers be satisfied as to their Qualifications, or know whether they are *apt to teach*, or whether they have Ability or Inclination to *convince Gainsayers*. One would think Protestants should not plead for such a blind Conduct, or act implicitly in a Matter of so great Moment and Importance.

4. THE Ministers of Christ should *defend the Gospel* by seasonable Advices and Exhortations, and by solemn Warnings and Admonitions. Ministers, especially in *perilous Times*, should advise and exhort Christians to beware of the Leaven of unsound Doctrine, and guard against Seducers; to *keep the good Thing committed to them*, and stand fast in the Faith. Tho' we are not to pronounce damnatory Sentences, or sit as Judges of Mens final and eternal State, yet we should warn them of the Danger their Souls are expos'd to, by entertaining Opinions subversive of the great and fundamental Truths of the Gospel. Some are to be ^h *rebuk'd sharply, that they may be sound in the Faith*. If any of our Flock should happen to go astray, and wander into By-Paths, we should strive to reduce them by salutary Counsels, by affectionate Intreaties, and by laying before them the fatal Tendency of their evil Ways. Such as turn aside from the Holy Commandment deliver'd unto them, should be smartly reprov'd.

As Ministers should guide and encourage the Weak, and *gather these Lambs in their Arms*; and as they should nourish *Babes in Christ* with the *sincere Milk of the Word*; so they should

^h Tit. i. 13.

admonish the Erroneous, and warn the Unruly, and shew them the Hazards they run by renouncing Christianity, either in Principle or Practice. See in what an awful Manner Paul speaks to Timothy, ⁱ *I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the Quick and the Dead at his Appearing, and his Kingdom; Preach the Word; be instant in Season, out of Season; Reprove, Rebuke, Exhort with all Long-suffering and Doctrine.* It follows, ^k *For the Time will come when they will not endure sound Doctrine, but after their own Lusts shall they heap unto themselves Teachers, having itching Ears. And they shall turn away their Ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto Fables.* As the Gospel is committed to our Trust, we are to make full Proof of our Ministry, ^l *warning every Man, and teaching every Man in all Wisdom, that we may present every Man perfect in Christ Jesus.*

AND thus I have pointed at the Methods the Ministers of Christ should make use of in Defence of the Gospel. *Knowing that I am set for the Defence of the Gospel.*

A P P L I C A T I O N.

VI. AND lastly, I proceed to apply the Whole. And,

I. Is it so, That the Ministers of Christ are *set for the Defence of the Gospel.* Then this may serve to inform us of the Difficulty of the Work we are call'd to. The pastoral Office is not a Post of Ease and Pleasure, or of Pomp and

ⁱ 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

^k Vers. 3, 4.

^l Colof. i. 28.

Grandeur:

Grandeur : No, the Work of a Minister is a very hard and difficult Work. The Characters we bear import Diligence and Industry, Sagacity and Watchfulness. The Adversaries of Truth we are to contend with, are neither few nor contemptible, and it is not the Task of an easie Labour to guard against them, to unravel their Schemes, discover their Stratagems, and defeat their cunning and artful Devices.

THE Gospel hath many Enemies, and meets with great Opposition from all Quarters.

SOME of its Doctrines are so sublime and mysterious, that they are boldly attack'd by the subtil Cavils, haughty Reasonings, and *perverse Disputings of Men of corrupt Minds* : And its Precepts are so pure and spiritual, that they are vigorously encounter'd by the Lusts and Passions of others. Some appear barefac'd, and bid Defiance to the Revelation of Jesus Christ : And others act under a Covert, *privily* bringing damnable *Heresies*, and secretly sap and undermine the Foundations of our Holy Religion. Men of Wit will make a Jest of Gospel-Mysteries, and turn *the Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, into Sport and Banter. Men of Reason will raise an Army of Objections against the Doctrine of Christ, and try all the Arts of sophistical Argumentation to charge it with Absurdity and Contradiction. And Men of Rage and Violence will *breath out Threatning and Slaughter* against the Preachers of the Gospel, and strive to suppress the Truth by all the Methods of Injustice, Cruelty and Oppression. And seeing the Gospel meets with so much Opposition, what undaunted Courage and excellent Abilities should they be Masters of, who are set for its Vindication and Defence?

MINISTERS are put (as it were) in the Front of the Battel, and should maintain their Ground against the fierce and open Attacks of Persecution, and clandestine Attempts and Incroachments of Heresy and false Doctrine. And, *Who is sufficient for these Things?* What a rich Furniture of Gifts and Graces is needful for such as are engag'd in the Ministerial Function, to help them to acquit themselves with Fidelity and Honour in that eminent Station they are plac'd in? What great Reason have we to follow *Paul's* Advice to *Timothy*, ^m and give Attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, to Doctrine, and meditate on these Things. But above all, to pray with Fervour and Importunity for the gracious Conduct, Direction, and Influence of the Holy Spirit, that we may be *able Ministers of the New Testament*, and defend the Truth as it is in Jesus.

2. WITH what little Reason and Justice have some Men cast black and odious Aspersions upon the Assembly, and made frightful and tragical Outcries against our late Proceedings? After all the Noise and Clamour which have been rais'd against us, upon a serious Review we need not be asham'd of our Conduct. The Necessity and Importance of the Case will justify all the Steps we have taken; and if we suffer Reproach for a good Cause and a good Conscience, let us take it patiently, and not render Evil for Evil, and Railing for Railing. We may venture to appeal to all impartial and unprejudic'd Judges, whether the Methods we have pursued in Defence of the Gospel have not been just and righteous? ⁿ *We have wrong'd no Man, we have corrupted no Man,*

^m 1 Tim. iv. 13, 15.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vii. 2.

we have defrauded no Man. Whose Right have we invaded? Whose Liberty have we cramp'd or violated? What Engines of Cruelty have we invented to extort a Confession of Faith? What Rigours have we used? Or what Hardships and Severities have we inflicted? We pretend to no coercive Power in Matters of Religion, but hope we shall ever maintain those *Principles which are most friendly to Mankind*, and most agreeable to the Spirit and Genius of the Gospel. And as we would crave leave to judge for our selves, and act according to the Sentiments of our own Minds, so we trust the Methods we have pursued in *Defence of the Truth*, are far from Persecution, and can scarce think they are entirely free from the Charge, who have attempted to fix this Odium upon us. Does a voluntary Declaration of our Faith look like an Imposition upon our Brethren, or a claiming Jurisdiction over other Mens Consciences?

IF any of the Ministers who subscrib'd, did it with Reluctance, or if they were constrained to it by any worldly Views, let them speak out, and answer for themselves, and before they do so, it is too bold and assuming to judge the Secrets of their Hearts, or determine the Principles and Motives by which they were acted. Can it be fairly interpreted as setting up a Court of *Inquisition*, to give an express Assent to the *Doctrine of the Trinity*, as we conceive it is plainly revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures, or to form a Resolution not to invest any with the Sacred Office, who will not satisfy us as to the Soundness of their Faith in this important Article? Or can it be justly deem'd derogatory to the Autho-

D

rity

rity of Christ, to sign and publish what we take to be his Mind and Will?

WHEN we thought some of the great Truths of the Gospel were in Danger of being lost, and poisonous Errors were propagating and encreasing, could it be a Crime in us to pursue such Measures as we judg'd proper and necessary to establish our People in the Faith, and put a stop to the spreading Contagion? Or if Ministers should be suspected to hold pernicious Opinions, contrary to sound Doctrine, have they no Right to make a frank and open Confession, to clear themselves, and wipe off the Imputation?

It looks odd in those Men, who have contended so much for *Liberty* and *Charity*, not to allow their Brethren a *Liberty* to subscribe the Truth; or if they should be so bold to do it, instead of putting a candid and favourable Construction upon their Management, load them with hard Censures and *uncharitable* Reflection. Are we not the Ministers of Christ Jesus? And must we be blam'd if we imitate our Great Lord and Master, who before ^o *Pontius Pilate* witnessed a good Confession? *Paul* speaks in a Way of Commendation concerning *Timothy* his own Son in the Faith, that ^p *he had confessed a good Confession before many Witnesses.*

q “ IF Christians in general (much more should Ministers) contend for the Gospel by :
 “ constant resolute adhering to the Profession
 “ of Christianity, in Opposition to all Temptations to part with, and recede from it, against

^o 1 Tim. iv. 13. ^p 1 Tim. vi. 12. ^q Huddy's Sermon, p. 12.

“ all those Persons and Things which are apt to
 “ shake our Constancy, and fright us from our
 “ Duty, seduce, allure, or betray us to a cow-
 “ ardly deserting, or *sneaking Concealment of our*
 “ *Faith*, or to a Practice inconsistent with it;
 “ and by the patient bearing all the Evils and
 “ Inconveniencies which the steady Profession
 “ of it may expose us to”. They are the
 Words of the Reverend Mr. *Huddy* in his Ser-
 mon before the *Assembly*.

3. IF, as the Ministers of Christ, we are *set for*
the Defence of the Gospel; then let us not decline
 our Duty, or start from our Post: But let us
 strenuously assert the Doctrine, plead the Cause,
 and vindicate the Honour and Dignity of our
 great Lord and Master, expecting Support, En-
 couragement, and a Reward from him. [†] *Seeing*
we have this Ministry, let us faint not; but re-
nouncing the hidden Things of Dishonesty, not walk-
ing in Craftiness, nor handling the Word of God
deceitfully; let us by Manifestation of the Truth,
commend ourselves to every Man's Conscience in the
Sight of God. That good Thing which is com-
 mitted to us, let us keep by the Holy Ghost,
 and be strong in the Lord, and in the Power of
 his Might.

IT is with an affecting Sorrow I think on the
 fatal Errors, and unhappy Divisions sprung up
 in our Days, which *eat as doth a Canker*, and
 shed a malignant Influence upon the Vitals of
 Christianity.

THE Infidel and the Deist would fain pluck
 up our Holy Religion by the Roots, and leave
 us to the glimmering Light of Nature, as the

† 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

only Guide to Heaven and eternal Happiness. These Men with their impious Hands strike at the whole Fabrick of Divine Revelation, and attempt to raze it to the very Foundation.

BUT there are others, who pretend Friendship to Christianity, and yet apparently weaken the blessed Building by shaking the Pillars, if not by pulling out the chief Corner-Stone of it. But whatever Efforts may be made against the Divinity of our blessed Saviour, or the awful Mysteries of the Gospel, let us stand up in their Vindication and Defence. *Where is the Wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World? For after that in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe. Let no Man deceive himself: If any Man among you seemeth to be wise in this World, let him become a Fool, that he may be wise.*

THE Cavils which have been raised against the Doctrine of the *Trinity* seem to be owing to an undue Veneration for Reason, and the Want of a just Regard to supernatural Revelation.

As Men should not put out their Eyes, renounce their Understandings, or take Things upon Trust, and give up themselves to an implicit Faith; so they should not be too curious in prying into Divine Mysteries, but firmly believe what God hath plainly reveal'd in his Word, tho' the short Line of Reason should not be able to fathom or comprehend it. As Protestants it is our standing and avowed Principle, that we

^f 1 Cor. i. 20, 21. ^t 1 Cor. iii. 18.

ought to make sober and impartial Enquiries into the Grounds of our Religion, that we may be able to give a *Reason of the Hope that is in us*; and as Christians we should submit to Divine Revelation, and *think* under the Conduct and Direction of the supreme Being, whose *Understanding is infinite*, and whose *Ways are past finding out*.

THERE are some Things in Nature beyond our Reach and Capacity, at least in our present dark and imperfect State, which puzzle and non-plus all the Reason and Philosophy of Mankind; no Wonder then we find our selves at a Loss when we soar aloft to contemplate the God of Nature, and search into that *great Mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the Flesh*. Let the great Masters of Reason solve some of the Mysteries of Nature. Let them tell us how the inanimate Seed (which is void of Contrivance and Self-Motion) when cast into the Earth, springs up into the Contexture and Form of its proper Plant. Let them tell us by what secret and invisible Ties the Soul which is an immaterial Spirit, is united to Flesh and Blood? And how it acts and operates upon the Body, how we feel Pleasure and Pain, and how we move a Leg or an Arm, a Hand, a Finger, or the like? Let them give a plain and express Account of these, and many other abstruse Things in Nature, and fairly answer all Objections; and then it would look more decent in them, to demand of us to solve the Mystery of the Trinity, which is a proper Object of Faith, and above Reason, tho' not contrary to it: Then these Men might with a better Grace ask, how One can be Three, and Three One; or how there is but one God,
and

and yet that this one God is Father, Son, and Spirit. Proud Man would fain stretch Reason beyond its due Bounds, and make bold Enquiries into Things too lofty and sublime for his narrow Faculties. *For who can by searching find out God?* Some will give way to a vain Curiosity, and gaze into the most tremendous Mysteries, tho' it many times proves fatal, and leads them into destructive Errors; like the *Bethshemites*, who would look into the Ark, tho' they smarted for it.

WHAT remains, but for me,

4. AND lastly, to address my self to the People.

SUFFER, my Brethren, a Word of Exhortation, and let me intreat you to hold fast the faithful Word, as you have been taught, and be not tossed to and fro by every Wind of Doctrine. Private Christians have a Part to act in defending the Gospel, as well as Ministers. *"Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."*

WE have no greater Joy, than to see you stedfastly adhere to, and *walk in the Truth, with one Mind, striving together for the Faith of the Gospel.* Your Lot is fallen in a Time of Trial; may the God of all Grace, *stablish, strengthen, settle you,* that you may never quit the good Foundation you have built your Hopes and Confidence upon. *Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they are of God.* Be mighty in the Scriptures; bring every Opinion to the sacred Test; and let the Bible be the only Rule of your Religion. Let not *your Faith stand in*

1 Sam. vi. 19.

1 Thes. iii. 8.

the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God. Give your firm Assent to what God hath manifestly declared in his Holy Word, and do not argue and dispute against it. Let the Revelation of Christ be the Object of your Faith, tho' it may be a Mystery to your Reason. Be not too nice and curious in searching into what is unfathomable. Launch not out too far, lest you go beyond your Length, lose your Ground, and plunge in the deep. *Consent to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according to Godliness; avoiding prophane and vain Babblings, and Oppositions of Science falsely so called. Beware lest any Man spoil you through Philosophy, and vain Deceit, after the Tradition of Men, after the Rudiments of the World, and not after Christ; for in him dwelleth the Fulness of the Godhead bodily* *.

It should be Matter of Lamentation, that any in our Days should deny the true and proper Divinity of our Saviour. Upon this Score the Christian may complain of such as these, as *Mary did in another Case; y They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* When once Persons deny the Godhead of Christ, they seem to be at a Loss where to fix him, or in what Rank or Order of Being to assign his Place and Station. The *Soci-nians* will scarce own him to be any more than a mere Man. The *Arians* advance him to the Dignity of a super-angelical Creature: And some of late have attempted to refine the *Arian* Notion, and to give it (as they imagine) a more plausible Turn, by making him to be something

* Colof. ii. 8, 9. † John xx. 13.

more than a Creature, and yet not the most high God, or equal to the Father. But what Medium can there be between finite and infinite, between limited and unlimited? As for the Opinion of a middle Being between a Creature and the supreme God, in the Apprehensions of many, it carries in it a plain Contradiction; but if vulgar Understandings must vail to Men of brighter Capacities and politer Parts, then what becomes of the protestant Notion of a *Judgment of Discretion*, and of all those specious Declamations some have made against *Infallibility*, who perhaps might think themselves wrong'd, if they are not esteem'd more zealous Contenders for the Principles of the Reformation than their Brethren?

THE Deity of our Saviour is so plainly and fully asserted in the Holy Scriptures, that he who runs, may read; and a serious, humble Christian, who was never train'd up in the critical Arts of Sophistry and subtil Equivocation, soon discovers the important Truth, and is ready to break out with *Thomas* into a devout Rapture of Adoration, and say, *My Lord and my God*. The excellent Sermon lately preach'd on this Subject before this venerable Assembly, contains a noble Defence of the Divinity of the blessed Jesus. Let this valuable Point, as well as all the other great and precious Truths of the Gospel, be inviolably maintain'd by you, and carefully kept as a sacred Depositum, and an incomparable Treasure. And ² *as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him*. Transcribe his Virtues and Graces, and write after that glorious and

² Col. ii. 6.

shining Copy your dear Redeemer hath set before you. Let your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ; and adorn the Doctrine of God your Saviour in all Things. ^a *Faith without Works is dead, being alone.* If you are right in your Creed, yet if you are wrong in your Practice, you shall never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. A wicked Life will bring upon Men certain and swift Destruction, as well as damnable Heresies. For the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men. And *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord.* ^b Therefore giving all Diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, brotherly Kindness; and to brotherly Kindness, Charity. For if these Things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the blessed Gospel which hath appeared unto you effectually teach you to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts; and to live soberly, righteously and godlily in this present evil World.

FINALLY, my Brethren, whatsoever Things are true; whatsoever Things are honest; whatsoever Things are just; whatsoever Things are pure; whatsoever Things are lovely; whatsoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praise, think on these Things, and persevere in the Practice of them; and then when you come to your final

^a James ii. 17.

^b 2 Pet. i. 5, 6.

Exit, you may go off the Stage of this Life with Applause and Triumph, as *Paul* did, who could say; *I have fought the good Fight; I have finish'd my Course; I have kept the Faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness; which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that Day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his Appearing.*

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